

His-Panic

Talk TV sensationalists and axe-grinding ideologues have fallen for a myth of immigrant lawlessness.

Ron Unz

According to Lou Dobbs, “a third of the prison population in this country is estimated to be illegal aliens,” and Glenn Beck regularly warns of “an illegal alien crime wave.” Congressman Tom Tancredo insists, “The face of illegal immigration on our borders is one of murder, one of drug smuggling, one of vandalism for all the communities along the border, and one of infiltration of people coming into this country for purposes to do us great harm.” Michelle Malkin adds an even more terrifying note, calling our borders “open channels not only for illegal aliens and drug smugglers, but terrorists, too.” Even as far back as 2000, the highly regarded General Social Survey found that 73 percent of Americans believed that immigration caused higher crime rates, a level of concern considerably greater than fears about job losses or social unity.

As Latino gangs have gained notoriety in the United States—particularly MS-13, dubbed the “The World’s Most Dangerous Gang” by usually restrained *National Geographic*—images of violent foreigners have come to dominate much of the national debate on immigration policy. A perception has taken root in the minds of the American public and many elected leaders that the greatest threat posed by mass immigration is crime.

In recent decades, most immigrants have been Hispanic; Asians, who constitute the other large portion of the inflow, are generally regarded as economically successful and law-abiding. Although many Hispanics are American-born, the vast majority still comes from a relatively recent immigrant background. So to a considerable extent, popular concerns about immigrant crime and popular concerns about Hispanic crime amount to the same thing. While fears of perceived racial insensitivity may force many critics to choose their words carefully, widespread belief that Hispanics have high or perhaps very high crime rates seems to exist.

But is this correct? Or are these concerns rooted in the same excitable and ideological mindset that produced endless stories of Saddam’s notorious WMD, with activists and their media accomplices passing along rumors and personal beliefs in pursuit of a political agenda rather than bothering to determine the facts? Does America face a Hispanic crime problem or merely a Hispanic crime hoax?

Personal experiences are no substitute for detailed investigation, but they sometimes provide a useful reality check. Since the early 1990s, I’ve lived in Silicon Valley, a region in which people of white European ancestry are a relatively small minority, separately outnumbered by both Asians and Hispanics, with many of the latter quite poor and often here illegally. On any given day, more than half of the people I encounter in Palo Alto are Hispanics from immigrant backgrounds. Yet my area of the country has exceptionally low crime rates and virtually no serious ethnic conflict. This confounds the expectations of many of my East Coast friends.

Prior to moving back to my native California, I lived for five years in Jackson Heights,

Queens, one of the most heavily immigrant and ethnically diverse parts of New York City. There as well, white Europeans were a small minority and immigrants from various Latin American countries were the largest ethnic group, close to an absolute majority of the local population. On a typical afternoon or evening, probably 80 percent of the people walking the streets of my neighborhood were non-white, and on dozens of occasions I returned home from Manhattan on a late-night train, the only white face in the subway car. Yet in all my years of living there, I never encountered a hostile or menacing situation, let alone suffered an actual criminal attack. Hardly what one would expect from television images, let alone the wild claims made by conservative magazines or talk radio. The “thousands of brutal assailants and terrorists” *City Journal*’s Heather Mac Donald finds among our immigrant population must have moved into someone else’s neighborhood.

So were my personal experiences atypical? Or are the media and conservative movement portrayals so completely wrong? Hispanics will constitute a quarter of the American population within a generation or two according to current demographic projections, so this is an important issue for the future of our country.

The obvious way to answer the question is to consult the public FBI Uniform Crime Report database, which provides aggregated information on the race of all criminal suspects throughout America. Unfortunately, there’s a problem: Hispanic criminals are sometimes reported as “white” and sometimes not, rendering the federal crime data almost useless. Therefore, indirect means must be used to estimate the crime rate of Hispanics compared to whites. (Throughout this essay, “white” shall refer to non-Hispanic whites.)

One metric to examine might be relative incarceration rates, since most people who begin a life of criminal activity end up behind bars sooner or later—usually sooner. Furthermore, since so much of prison violence is along racial lines, correctional authorities are careful to record the ethnicity of individual inmates, and the aggregate data is made available annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Indeed, over the years, prison-reform groups such as The Sentencing Project, as well as various federal judges, have used this official data to criticize the prison system for its massive overrepresentation of racial minorities among inmates relative to their share of the population.¹

If we examine the data in the most recent 2008 BJS report, published in December 2009, we discover the total Hispanic incarceration rate, while far below that of blacks, is still almost 150 percent above the white average, having fallen a little from the 170 percent figure in 2000.² So perhaps those fearful commentators are right and Hispanics commit crimes at roughly two-and-a-half times the rate of whites in America.

The traditional liberal explanation for this would be that Hispanics are considerably poorer than whites, that poverty and racism cause crime, and that a white-dominated criminal justice system is likely to be biased against suspects of a darker hue. There may or may not be some truth in these common liberal arguments, but since the name of this magazine is *The American Conservative*, let us put them aside at least for now and consider other possible factors.

The most obvious of these are age and gender. An overwhelming fraction of serious

crime is committed by the young, young males in particular. This has been the case throughout recorded history and remains true everywhere in today's world. Almost all American crimes are committed by individuals aged 15-44, with the age range 18-29 representing the sharp peak of criminal activity. Also, the 14-to-1 ratio of males to females in the U.S. prison system provides a sense of just how heavily crime is a male phenomenon; for violent offenses, the ratio is even higher.

And as it happens, the age distribution in America for Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites is quite different. The median age for Hispanics is around 27, near the absolute peak of the prime-crime age range. But the median white age is over 40, putting nearly half the white population above the likely age range for committing crimes. While it is certainly true that Hispanic 23-year-olds have much greater criminal tendencies than white 45-year-olds, a more useful question is the relative criminality of Hispanics and whites of the same age. Also, many Hispanics are immigrants, and since immigrants are more likely to be male, there will be a gender skew in the general Hispanic population. Therefore, let us consider the Hispanic imprisonment rate relative to the number of males in the high-crime age range.

Suddenly the numbers change quite a bit, with the relative Hispanic-to-white total incarceration rate dropping by a third or more for several of the age cohorts. But even these lower figures may still be a bit misleading. As a recent front page *New York Times* story pointed out, over half of all federal prosecutions these days are for immigration-related offenses, and since a huge fraction of illegal immigrants are from south of the border, the 10 percent or so of U.S. prison inmates who are in federal custody might significantly distort our ethnic imprisonment statistics.³ Anyway, offenses such as robbery, rape, murder, burglary, assault, and theft are almost always prosecuted in state courts, so it makes sense to separate these street crimes from cases of illegal nannies convicted of illegal nannying.

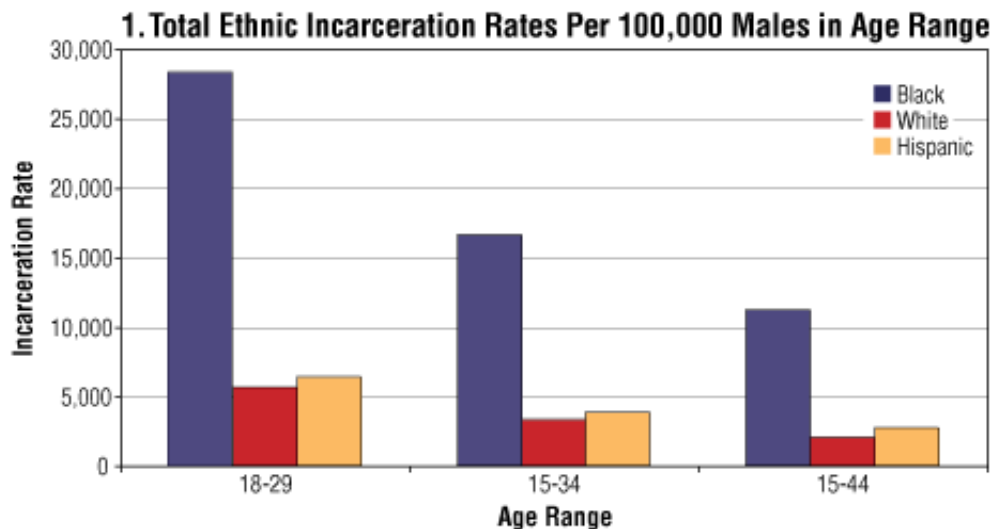
Another important reason to focus on state-level imprisonment data is the evidence of vast differences among regional criminal-justice systems due to various cultural and political factors. For example, whites in Oklahoma are incarcerated at a rate almost 300 percent higher than whites in New Jersey, and while some of this disparity may result from the greater criminal tendencies of white Oklahomans, it seems likely that the harshness of the local courts and sentencing guidelines may also play an important role. We should therefore try to compare Hispanic incarceration rates with those for whites on a state-by-state basis so as to minimize the impact of differences in local criminal-justice systems.

The most recent BJS publications do not provide state-by-state incarceration data broken down by ethnicity, but the 2005 BJS Bulletin did exactly that, and while relative Hispanic incarceration rates have fallen somewhat in the past five years, the drop has not been large. Therefore, we should be able to use the 2005 figures with confidence.⁴

Our first discovery is that even before adjusting for age, the overall Hispanic incarceration rate drops from 150 percent above the white rate down to just 80 percent above, presumably reflecting the exclusion of immigration-related federal offenses. We can now use census data to estimate the number of prime-crime-age young males in the two groups, and since there is some uncertainty in deciding which age range is most appropriate for normalization purposes, we should probably explore

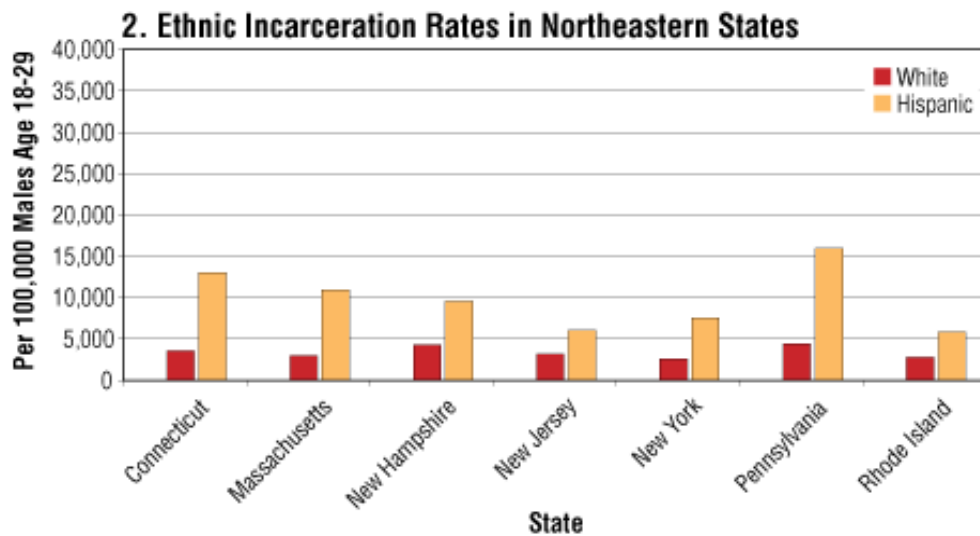
the results with several different choices, such as 18-29, 15-34, and 15-44.5 (Many observers believe that the number of Hispanic illegal immigrants in America is sharply underestimated by the government; if so, this would correspondingly reduce the relative Hispanic imprisonment rate.)

The overall age-adjusted national incarceration rates are shown in Chart 1. Hispanic incarceration rates are now between 13 and 31 percent above the white average, depending upon which age range we choose for normalization purposes. By contrast, the claims of extremely high relative black incarceration rates widely publicized several years ago by The Sentencing Project remain correct even after these age adjustments.



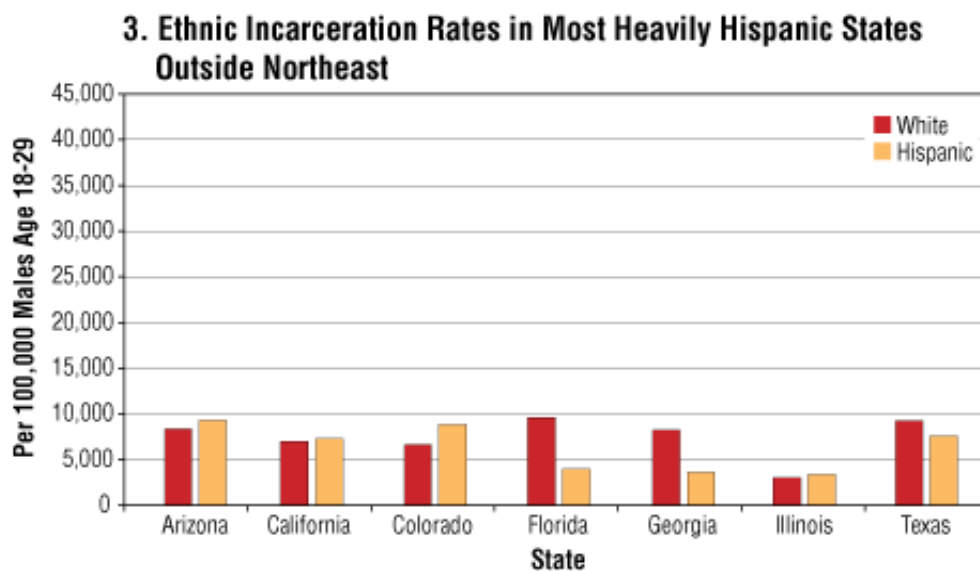
Next, if we examine the relative age-adjusted Hispanic imprisonment rate for individual states, we find huge variations. In a number of states, the Hispanic rate is below the white rate, sometimes far below. For example, whites in West Virginia, Arkansas, and Louisiana are imprisoned at three to four times the Hispanic rate relative to their share of the crime-age population. To some degree, this reflects the time-lag impact of the recent arrival of large numbers of Hispanics in these locations, since most of the white convicts entered prison years ago, but such low relative rates of Hispanic incarceration are still intriguing. And even in Florida, where Hispanics have been a large fraction of the total population for decades, the white age-adjusted imprisonment rate is still twice as high as the Hispanic rate.

Furthermore, contrary to official bureaucratic categories, Hispanics are hardly a monolithic ethnic group and actually exhibit large variations in their cultural traditions based on country of origin. The very low Hispanic imprisonment rate in Florida may reflect the considerable economic and social success of the Cuban community centered there. Another set of obvious outliers are the states of the Northeast, primarily the New York/New England region, in which relative Hispanic imprisonment rates generally run two to three times higher than the national Hispanic average, as shown in Chart 2. These exceptionally high Hispanic incarceration rates probably reflect the considerable social and economic difficulties long experienced by the large Puerto Rican and Dominican communities that have settled in that region.

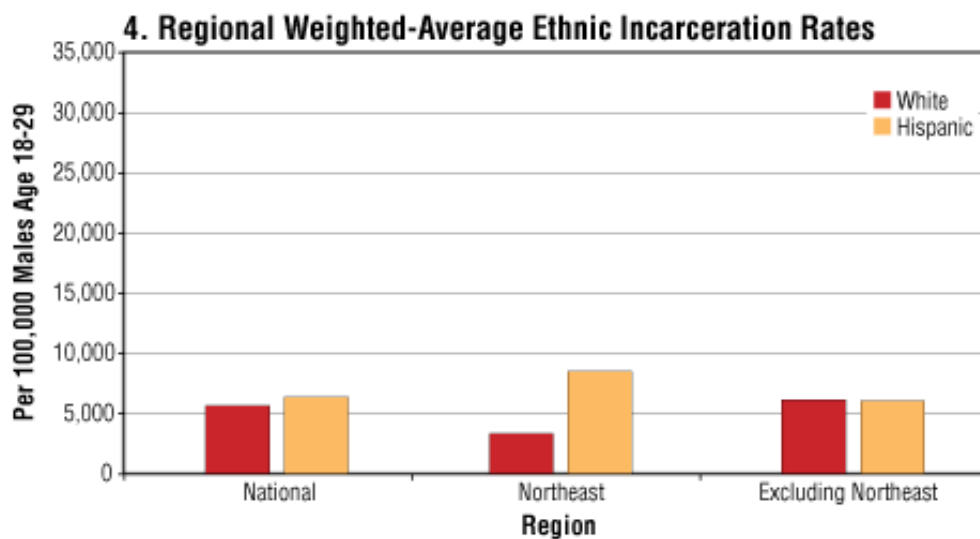


The high incarceration rate for these Caribbean Hispanics may partially explain general perceptions of Hispanic crime rates. A large proportion of America’s intellectual, media, and political elite lives in the Northeast, in cities like New York and Boston, and if the Hispanics traditionally living in those areas have unusually high rates of criminal activity, there would be a natural if mistaken tendency to assume that this same pattern also applied to Hispanic groups throughout the country.

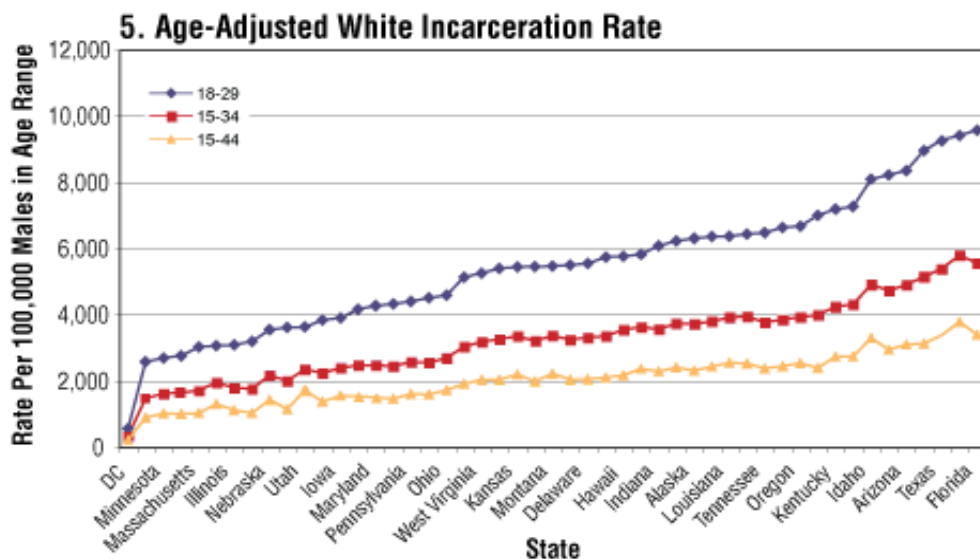
But outside the Northeast, the vast majority of Hispanics are Meso-American, being either from Mexico or Central America. Chart 3 summarizes the very different relative imprisonment rates for these groups by focusing on the most heavily Hispanic states outside the Northeast.



Moreover, if we consider weighted-average age-adjusted Hispanic imprisonment ratios excluding those outlying cases of the Northeastern states, we discover that the remaining figure moves into close parity with white incarceration rates. (See Chart 4.) Since Hispanics are still considerably poorer than whites, this is a striking result. Also, crime rates are always higher in densely populated urban areas than in suburbs or rural communities, and since Hispanics are three times as likely as whites to live in cities, their relatively low imprisonment rates become even more surprising.



Another important point to emphasize is the wide disparity in white incarceration rates throughout the country, even when adjusted relative to the number of whites in high-crime age ranges. For example, age-adjusted imprisonment rates for whites in large Southern states such as Florida, Texas, and Georgia may be 200 percent or even 300 percent higher than those for whites in large Northeastern or Midwestern states such as New York, New Jersey, or Illinois, as shown in Chart 5. Although it is impossible to disentangle completely how much of this gap may be due to higher criminality and how much due to harsher judicial systems, it seems likely that both play important roles. So even if the age-adjusted Hispanic incarceration rate is somewhat above the white rate—perhaps 15 percent higher on average—it still falls close to the center of the overall white distribution.



The substantial regional or cultural differences in apparent white criminality are easily illustrated when we consider the age-adjusted Hispanic/white incarceration ratios in the two most heavily Hispanic states, California and Texas, which together contain roughly half of all Hispanics living in the United States. If we normalize the incarceration rate to the number of males aged 15-34, California Hispanics are imprisoned at 9 percent above the local white rate, while Texas Hispanics are imprisoned at 14 percent below the local white rate. Since California is one of America’s most liberal “pro-minority” states and Texas one of the most staunchly “law-and-order” conservative ones, and the Hispanics in both states are

overwhelmingly Mexican, these somewhat unexpected imprisonment ratios probably reflect the relative criminality of the local white populations more than anything else.

Another important question is to what degree Hispanic criminal activity is influenced by immigration status. While there is a widespread popular impression that immigrants, especially illegal immigrants, have a propensity for violent crime, actual studies almost invariably come to the opposite conclusion: for almost every ethnic group, Hispanic or otherwise, immigrant generations have lower rates of criminal behavior than their American-born children. This has resulted in concerned speculation that even if Hispanic crime rates today are relatively low, this situation may be temporary, and once the Hispanic population shifts from being mostly immigrant to mostly native-born, crime rates might skyrocket. A 2006 Migration Policy Institute study estimated that imprisonment rates are some eight times higher for American-born citizens of Mexican ancestry than for their immigrant co-ethnics.⁶ If we can expect Mexican-American crime rates to rise 700 percent in the next generation, we should be very alarmed indeed.

But there are good reasons to doubt the plausibility of that horrific scenario. First, contrary to popular belief, the majority of today's Hispanics are already American-born, and this is certainly true of those in the highest-crime age groups. For example, two-thirds of today's Latinos aged 18-24 are American citizens by birth. This figure has risen from less than half 20 years ago, while crime rates have simultaneously plummeted nationwide, with relative Hispanic imprisonment rates also dropping significantly since 2000. If American-born Mexicans and Central Americans had the exceptionally high crime rates suggested in that 2006 study, it is strange that we have seen no evidence of this either in the trends of national crime data or in imprisonment statistics.

The major difficulty with the study's evidence is that while prisons have an easy time gathering ethnicity data, determining the immigration status of convicts is far more difficult, and is generally based on self-reporting. Not surprisingly, most convicted felons are not eager to reveal their lack of citizenship and then face deportation once their sentences are completed, so the numbers must be taken with a grain of salt. In fact, a November 2009 paper by Steven A. Camarota and Jessica M. Vaughan for the Center for Immigration Studies raised serious doubts about the accuracy of these federal immigrant-imprisonment statistics, both based on the doubtful methodology employed and the huge, anomalous swings that occur on an ongoing basis.⁷ For example, the official data seems to show a 28 percent decline in the number of incarcerated immigrants between 1990 and 2000, even as the total number of immigrants grew 59 percent, then a sudden 146 percent rise in incarcerated immigrants from 2000 to 2007, a period when immigrant numbers grew only 22 percent. Such changes seem highly implausible and lead to serious doubts that the gap between immigrant Hispanic and American-born Hispanic criminality is anywhere near as great as has been portrayed. Besides, since perhaps two-thirds of today's highest-crime-age Hispanic population is already American-born, there is a strong upper bound on how much crime rates would rise in the future as that fraction gradually rises to three-quarters or more.

Aside from these imprisonment rates, perhaps we can also gain insight into Hispanic criminality from the crime rates themselves. As mentioned before, the federal statistics on the ethnicity of criminals are unreliable, but by matching the

geographical distribution of crime with census data on Hispanic population percentages, we can gain strong circumstantial evidence about the relative criminality of Hispanics and whites.

The smaller the geographical unit we use, the more accurate our analysis will be. But while ethnicity rates can be found for individual zip codes, crime is reported by precinct, and matching these entirely different organizational units would be a major research undertaking. At the opposite end of the spectrum, doing calculations based on entire states provides little information since the populations and geographies are so large and often diverse, and important relationships would tend to remain hidden. The best compromise between effort and accuracy is to focus on America's larger cities, for which both crime and ethnicity data are readily available. Furthermore, crime rates are much higher in densely populated urban areas, so by confining our analysis to these, we are eliminating some of the bias that would occur if we compared crime rates in rural areas with those in urban ones. The U.S. has fewer than 80 cities with populations of 250,000 or more, and of these, less than half are major cities with at least half a million inhabitants. Such small data sets are reasonably easy to analyze.

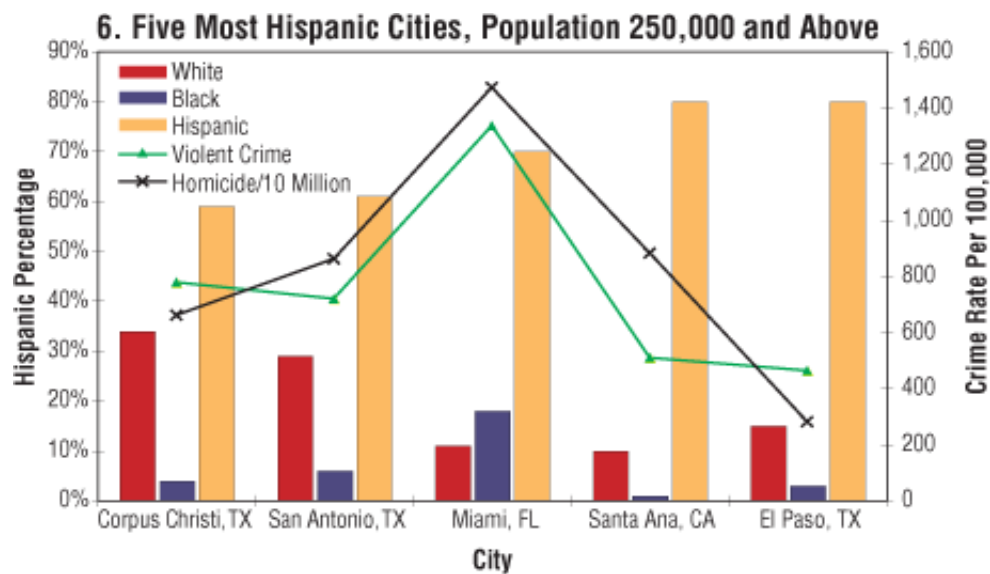
Take five minutes to consider the list of America's urban crime rates provided on Wikipedia, and you will notice an intriguing pattern.⁸ Nearly all of the most heavily Latino cities have low or even extremely low crime rates, and virtually none have rates much above the national average. Eighty percent Latino El Paso has the lowest homicide and robbery rates of any major city in the continental United States. This is not what we would expect to find if Hispanics had crime rates far higher than whites. Individual cities may certainly have anomalously low crime rates for a variety of reasons, but the overall trend of crime rates compared to ethnicity seems unmistakable.

But let us explore white and Hispanic crime rates in a more systematic fashion, drawing our data from the FBI Uniform Crime Report.⁹ Consider the five whitest cities in America: Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Portland, Oregon; Lexington, Kentucky; and Lincoln, Nebraska. These cities' populations average 76 percent white, 9 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent black. Their crime rates are generally far below the national urban average, with less than half the homicide and robbery rates and a 30 percent lower violent-crime rate. Perhaps we can consider these figures as a reasonable approximation to the general "white urban crime rate." These crime averages may be partly due to the local black and Hispanic populations, but since these cities are so overwhelmingly white, this estimate for the white crime rates is about as close as we can hope to get.

One difficulty we encounter is that these heavily white cities are extremely small in population, with three of the five barely registering over the 250,000 threshold required even to be included in our urban analysis and the average size being less than half that for most cities in our list. But augmenting this list with larger, less white cities would introduce other inaccuracies, so we have no choice but to use these small-city white-crime figures as a benchmark, although with considerable caution.

Now let us consider the five most Hispanic cities in America: Corpus Christi, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; Miami, Florida; Santa Ana, California; and El Paso, Texas. Together they total over 3 million in population, averaging 68 percent Hispanic, 22

percent white, and 6 percent black. The ethnicities and crime rates of these cities are displayed in Chart 6.



Overall, the crime rates for these most heavily Hispanic cities are generally low, with violent crime 10 percent below the national urban average and the homicide rate 40 percent lower. On the other hand, the crime rates are still well above those of the white cities we considered above. In fact, the white homicide and violent crime rates are almost one-third lower. This provides some evidence for a higher Hispanic crime rate.

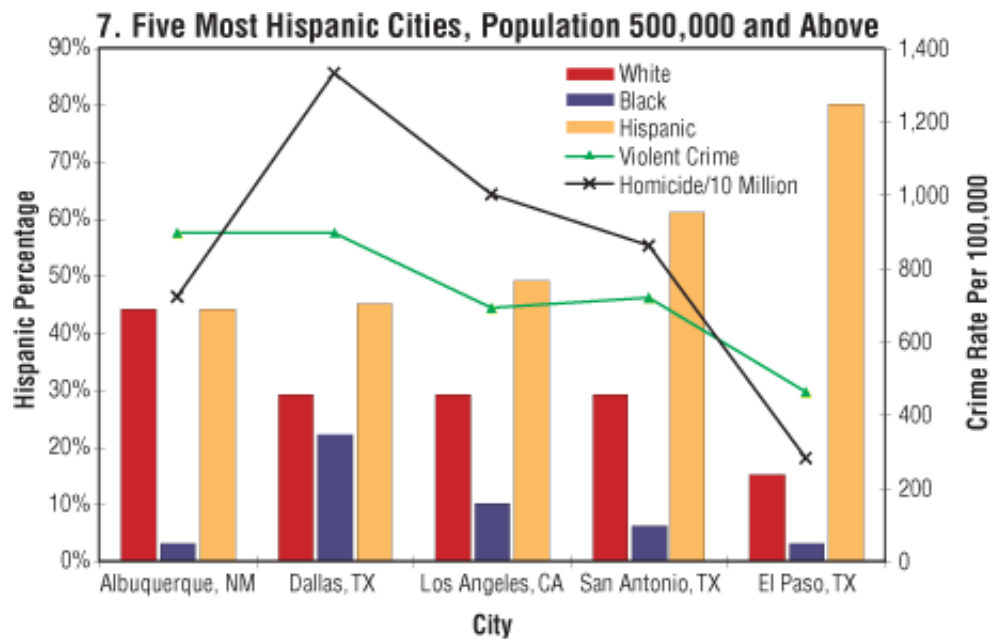
But this evidence is not particularly strong. First, the Hispanic cities are much larger than the white ones, with nearly double the average population. Also, Miami is an extreme outlier, with nearly twice as much crime as the other four Hispanic cities, and shifts the average considerably. If we exclude Miami, half the difference between the crime rates of the most Hispanic and the whitest cities disappears.

Even more striking, the average crime rates for the two most Hispanic cities on our list—Santa Ana and El Paso, each 80 percent Hispanic—are actually below our white urban average, and below the very low crime figures for 86 percent white Lincoln, the single whitest city in the nation. So although some heavily Hispanic cities have higher crime rates than some heavily white ones, the pattern seems very mixed.

Furthermore, if we consider the overall list of American cities, it is easy to find a number of those with sizable Hispanic populations—30, 40, 50 percent or more Hispanic—that have crime rates below our white urban average. If Hispanic crime rates were much higher than those for whites, this would seem very unlikely.

Similar evidence emerges if we restrict our analysis to major cities of half a million people or more and compare the average crime rates for the five most heavily Hispanic cities—Albuquerque, Dallas, Los Angeles, San Antonio, and El Paso—to the those of the five whitest—Oklahoma City, Columbus, Indianapolis, Seattle, and Portland. This time, the more Hispanic cities are the ones with the lower crime rates—10 percent below the white cities in homicide and 15 percent lower in violent crime. A particularly remarkable result is that gigantic Los Angeles—50 percent Hispanic and frequently perceived as a dangerous urban hellhole—has violent crime rates close to those of Portland, Oregon, the whitest major city in the nation at 74 percent. The

Hispanic cities and their crime rates are displayed in Chart 7.

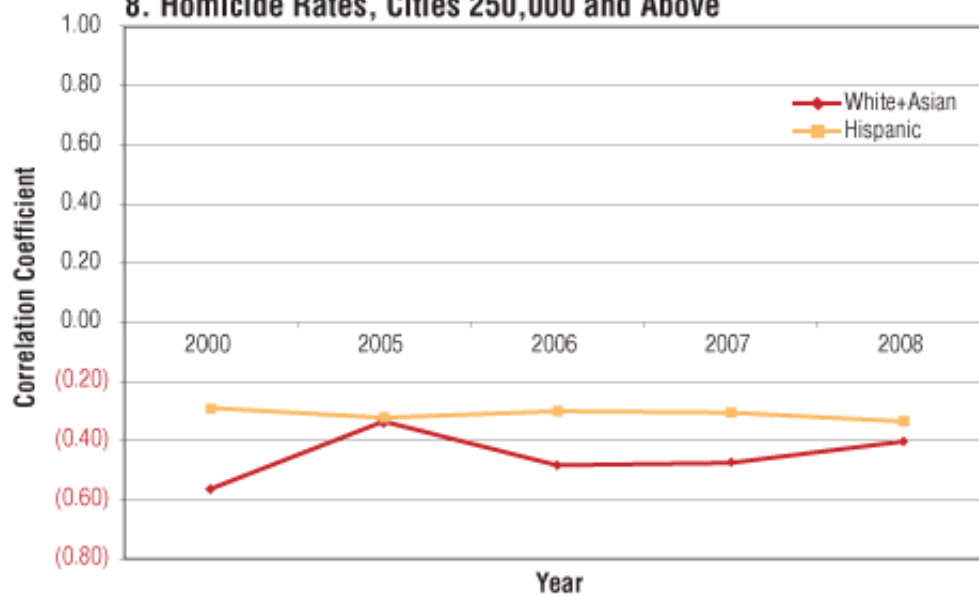


Here's a final example, much closer to home. Consider two large and comparable American cities—San Jose, California and Seattle, Washington. Both are located on the West Coast, are overwhelmingly suburban and generally affluent, earn their living from the technology industry, are politically liberal, and have small black populations. Seattle is one of the whitest cities in America at 70 percent, with Asians being the largest minority; Hispanics number only 5 percent. By contrast, San Jose is over 50 percent larger in size and although mostly white and Asian, is one-third Hispanic, with a large number of impoverished illegal immigrants. Seattle's crime rate is indeed low, but the crime rate in San Jose is actually much lower: one-third lower for homicide or violent crime in general and with less than half the robbery rate. In fact, none of the most heavily white major cities in America have crime rates anywhere near as low as one-third Hispanic San Jose.

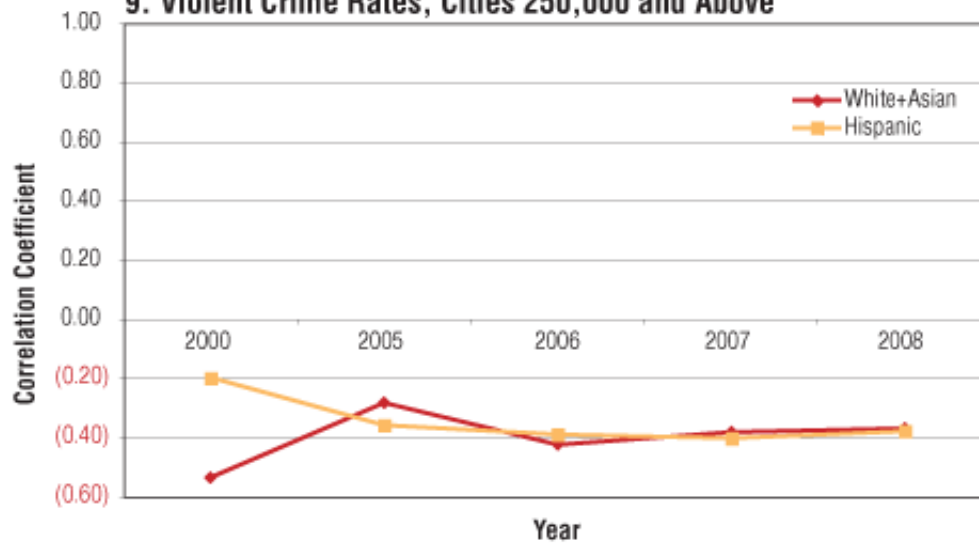
These individual city comparisons may be quantitatively extended to urban crime rates in general by calculating the weighted-average correlation coefficient between the Hispanic percentage of a city and its various crime rates and performing the same calculation for the white-plus-Asian percentage as well. (Asians are a very small population in most cities, so it is convenient to combine them with whites; since all studies show Asians tend to have much lower crime rates than whites, this will tend to reduce the apparent white crime rate.) Whereas all the previous urban crime figures quoted were from 2008, the latest year available, we can obtain the separate correlations for the last several years in order to consider trends over time.

As Charts 8-13 indicate, the Hispanic and white-plus-Asian crime correlation rates are usually quite close and in many cases have converged to almost identical values, at least since 2005. Moreover, we must remember that all these ethnic percentage rates refer to the total population rather than the percentage of young males in the high-crime years for each group, and as mentioned earlier, the age distributions for Hispanics and whites are very different. In fact, if we repeat these same correlation calculations for the population of males aged 18-29, the Hispanic and white rates substantially diverge, with young Hispanics usually being associated with significantly lower urban crime rates.

8. Homicide Rates, Cities 250,000 and Above



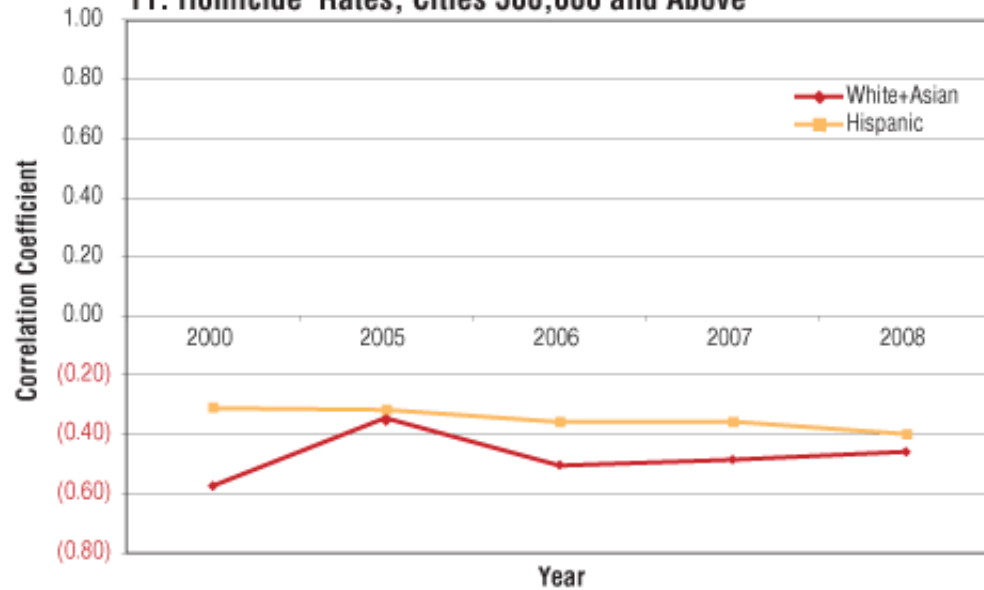
9. Violent Crime Rates, Cities 250,000 and Above



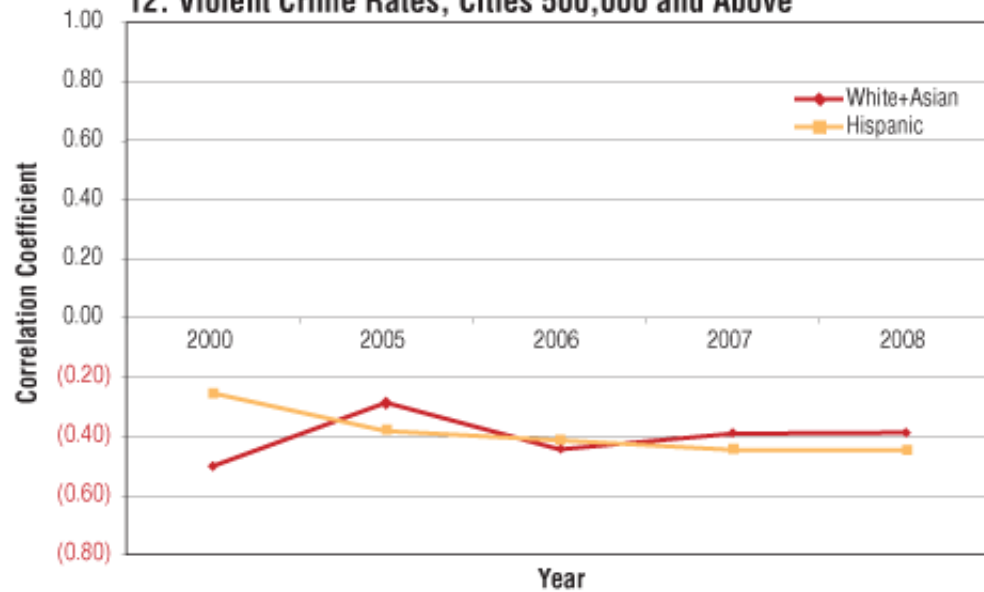
10. Robbery Rates, Cities 250,000 and Above



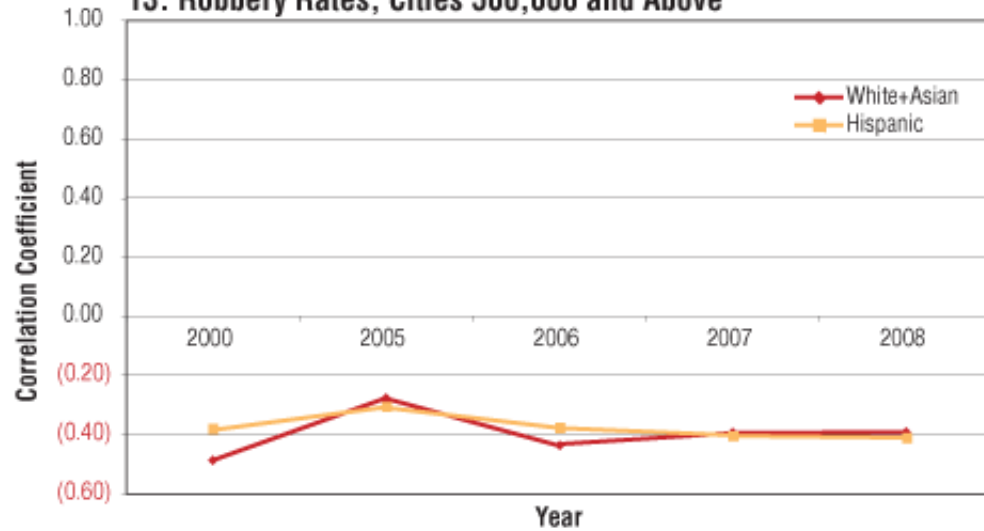
11. Homicide Rates, Cities 500,000 and Above



12. Violent Crime Rates, Cities 500,000 and Above



13. Robbery Rates, Cities 500,000 and Above

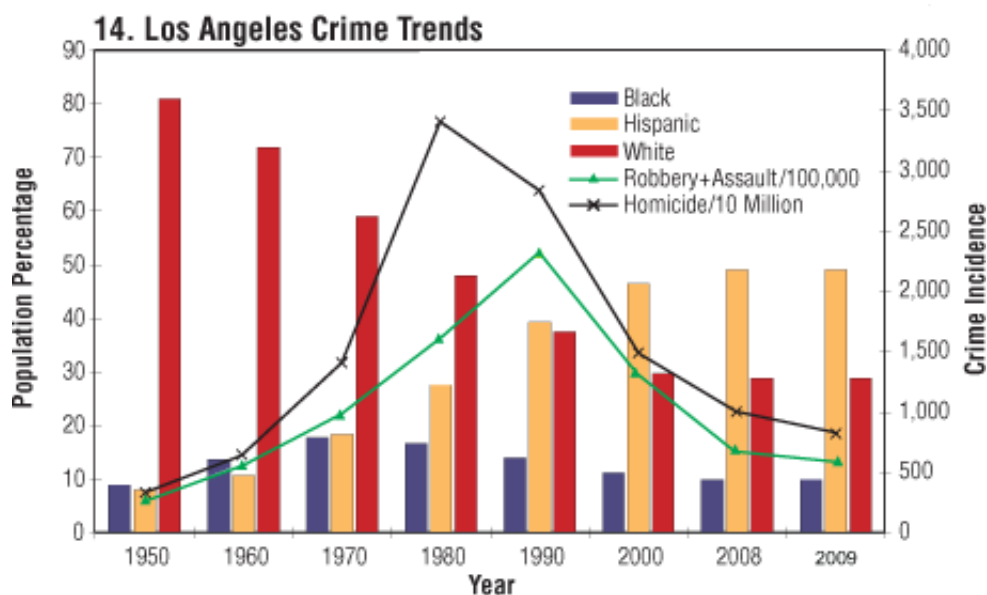


A reasonable question arises: are all of these crime rates actual, or might they be

statistical artifacts produced by widespread underreporting of crime in heavily Hispanic areas? We cannot absolutely eliminate this possibility, but for homicides the reporting rate is always close to 100 percent, and since for all these cities the homicide and other serious crime rates tend to follow very similar patterns, there is no evidence that any of these racial patterns were warped by substantial underreporting.

Finally, let us consider the historical crime trends in my native Los Angeles, America's second-largest city. During the middle of the 20th century, it was by far America's whitest large city—roughly 80 percent white European by ancestry—and was generally regarded as America's middle-class suburban paradise. But as the decades went by, LA increasingly became a byword for violence, crime, and ethnic conflict, with the deadly Watts and Rodney King racial riots filling television screens across the country. These enormously negative social changes coincided exactly with the population becoming less white, and although relatively few analysts were willing to suggest a direct causal relationship, I suspect it was noticed by all but the most obtuse observers. As early as 1982, a future LA served as the setting for Ridley Scott's dystopian film "Blade Runner," in which violence, poverty, and sudden death for a vast non-white immigrant population exist side by side with the sybaritic luxury of a tiny remaining white elite.

Since then, these ethnic demographic trends have continued apace, and Los Angeles today ranks as America's least white European large city. Half of the population is Hispanic, and many of these are impoverished illegal immigrants and their families. Yet all crime rates have been falling steadily over the last two decades, with homicide dropping a further 18 percent just last year. As Chart 14 illustrates, most major crime categories are now back down to where they were in the early 1960s, when the population really did look very much like the actors appearing in "Dragnet" and "Leave It to Beaver." And indeed, violent crime is now roughly the same as for Portland, Oregon, America's whitest major city.



This Los Angeles example also raises important questions about the official claims that Latino youths have exceptionally high rates of gang membership, 1800 percent higher than for whites. Los Angeles supposedly has among the worst Hispanic gang problems, yet the city's actual crime rates are roughly the same as what they were back in the lily-white days of the early 1960s. So if these local gangs aren't

committing much crime, what exactly is the definition of a “gang”?

A cynical observer might draw a connection between the hundreds of millions of dollars the federal government distributes each year for gang-prevention programs and the zeal with which local officials uncover the severity of their gang problems. In the case of Los Angeles, public officials have held January press conferences each of the last several years hailing the unprecedented drops in serious crime rates. They often follow these up a few months later with contrary press conferences on the horrific state of local gang violence and the desperate need for increased federal funds to cope with this scourge. If the federal government pays cities to find gang problems, many city officials will surely oblige them.

Admittedly, all of the arguments presented here are somewhat statistical and circumstantial. Correlation does not prove causality, and it might be possible to come up with a complex and detailed set of ad hoc theories and counter-arguments to explain away the vast mass of apparent evidence indicating relatively low Hispanic crime rates. But such an approach places the burden of proof on the wrong side.

The evidence presented here powerfully refutes the widespread popular belief that America’s Hispanics have high crime rates. Instead, their criminality seems to fall near the center of the white national distribution, being somewhat higher than white New Englanders but somewhat lower than white Southerners. Taken as a whole, the mass of statistical evidence constitutes strong support for the “null hypothesis,” namely that Hispanics have approximately the same crime rates as whites of the same age.

We must bear in mind that most Hispanics are still of very recent immigrant origins and thus are considerably poorer than the average American. There actually does exist a connection between poverty and crime, even if liberals make such a claim, and since today’s Hispanic population has roughly the same crime rate as far more affluent whites, there is every reason to expect that this crime rate will drop further as Hispanics continue to move up the economic ladder. As the American Enterprise Institute’s Douglas Besharov pointed out in an important but insufficiently noticed October 2007 *New York Times* column, the last decade or two have seen an extremely rapid economic advance for most of America’s Hispanic population. ¹⁰ This rise may be connected with the simultaneous and unexpectedly rapid drop in urban crime rates throughout the country.

Meanwhile, the national debate over immigration remains contentious. Restrictionists can provide numerous completely legitimate arguments in favor of their position, ranging from economic competition and cultural conflict to national overpopulation and environmental degradation. But they will discredit these by including unsubstantiated claims about crime. Conservatives have traditionally prided themselves on being realists, dealing with the world as it is rather than attempting to force it to conform to a pre-existing ideological framework. But just as many on the Right succumbed to a fantastical foreign policy that makes the world much more dangerous than it needs to be, some have also accepted the myth that Hispanic immigrants and their children have high crime rates. Such an argument may have considerable emotional appeal, but there is very little hard evidence behind it. ■

Ron Unz is publisher of The American Conservative. He thanks Razib Khan for his assistance in obtaining the crime and ethnicity data from several public websites and for running the cross correlations of the data.

Notes

- 1 "Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration by Race and Ethnicity," Marc Mauer and Ryan S. King, July 2007, The Sentencing Project.
- 2 "Prisoners in 2008," William J. Sabol, Heather C. West, and Matthew Cooper, December 2009, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*.
- 3 "Immigration Enforcement Fuels Rise in U.S. Cases," John Schwartz, December 21, 2009, *New York Times*.
- 4 "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005," Paige M. Harrison and Allen J. Beck, May 2006, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*.
- 5 American Ethnicity calculations are derived from the data provided by the Census Bureau, based on the 2000 Census for that year or the interim American Community Surveys for 2005-2008, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.
- 6 "Debunking the Myth of Immigrant Criminality: Imprisonment Among First- and Second-Generation Young Men," Ruben G. Rumbaut, Roberto G. Gonzales, Golnaz Komaie, and Charlie V. Morgan, June 1, 2006, Migration Policy Institute.
- 7 "Immigration and Crime: Assessing a Conflicted Issue," Steven A. Camarota and Jessica M. Vaughan, November 2009, Center for Immigration Studies.
- 8 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_cities_by_crime_rate, January 5, 2010, Wikipedia.
- 9 Urban crime rates are derived from the data provided by the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, available at <http://fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>.
- 10 "The Rio Grande Rises," Douglas J. Besharov, October 1, 2007, *New York Times*.

The original versions of Charts 1-5 contained a labelling error in the legends, which has now been corrected.

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